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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to identify the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that parents of children in bilingual education programs believe are important for them to play a meaningful role in their children's education. Parent training models, some created specifically for use with language minority parents, have not resulted in increased parent involvement or continuity of involvement. A review of literature revealed almost 100 training topics that field practitioners and other specialists have identified as areas of need. These topics were consolidated into 75 items divided almost evenly among the 3 categories of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. A pilot survey using these items was administered to chairpersons of parent advisory committees serving bilingual education programs in a five-state region. A second, more general study was developed using those results and administered to 300 parents representing 30 basic bilingual education programs. Parents responding to the pilot survey were more specific in their choice of skill areas than the general survey respondents, who thought all items were important and interrelated. Some differences among parent preferences were found to be related to sex, age, and state of residence, but little difference was found in relation to family size, educational attainment, language preference, or occupation.(MSE)

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Training for Minority Language Parents: Are We Providing Them What They Want or Need?

Jim Bransford and Rodolfo L. Chávez

In this study, we attempted to identify the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that parents of students in bilingual education programs believe are important in order for them to play a meaningful role in their children's education. Developing training programs for parents that reflect the areas parents believe to be important is critical to the success of any parent training model or activity.

Most people would be hard pressed to find any general opposition to the idea that parental involvement plays an important role in the educational efforts of children. This wholesale recognition is not limited to mainstream families, the white Anglo Saxon middle class, but extends through every social classification and includes families whose language and culture differ from those of the mainstream.

Over the years, especially following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, research studies have suggested that active parental involvement probably plays not just a part in the academic progress and achievement of the student, but plays perhaps one of the most critical parts. A number of these studies have shown a direct positive relationship between active parental involvement and students' academic achievement (Henderson, 1981; Martínez, 1979).

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As a result of some of these findings, federal and state agencies charged with providing educational and support services to special populations, especially those consisting of linguistic or culturally different groups, have mandated that parents of children participating in the various programs be involved meaningfully in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the programs (Keesling et al., 1981; Keller & Van Hooft, 1982).

In many cases, the agency directive has been preceded by federal or state legislation either encouraging or mandating parent participation. This is especially true of Title I, Title VI, and Title VII programs (Keller & Van Hooft, 1982) and is certainly true of early childhood development programs, most notably, Headstart.

Training activities that allow for the development of parental skills and knowledge in working cooperatively with the various agencies or schools for the benefit of those children have been supported by many of the federal and state-supported programs. Special funds in most Title programs are earmarked for parent training, and a number of agencies, including institutions of higher education, are encouraged, and in many cases funded, to develop programs providing for short-term as well as long-term training (Cruz, 1979).

PARENT TRAINING MODELS

The training activities discussed in the following paragraphs have developed, in some instances, into model programs. A number of the models were modifications of early efforts to involve mainstream parent groups, but some of the models were created specifically for use with language minority parents.

Children and Parents Interacting (CAPI) is one effort developed as a result of a federal mandate. Developed at Florida International University in Miami, this program is designed to create and promote greater Hispanic parent involvement (García, 1982). The major thrust of the program is to involve or enhance the involvement of such client populations as Hispanic parents and their limited-English proficient children, who demonstrate difficulty in the educational process. Its objectives are pursued through the implementation of cycles of parent-child training sessions and also follow-up activities. The training emphasizes the importance of positive interaction and communication among parents, children, and meaningful others. The ultimate goal is to strengthen student academic skills and English-language profi-

ciency. Training sessions focus on such issues as parenting skills, human interaction, the importance of parental involvement in the schools, U.S. educational philosophy, tutoring skills, and developing communication skills (García, 1982).

The Tri-State Bilingual Parent Training Program, developed at St. Michael's College in Vermont, is another example of a minority language parent training model (Crespo & Louque, 1984). Although developed for a special geographical population, the model can be generalized. Its purpose is to improve community awareness and parents' abilities to collaborate on various educational activities for children. Workshops on schooling, child development, bilingual education, and other areas are provided (Crespo & Louque, 1984). Learning more about schools and how they operate along with what parents can expect from them is one objective of this specific model. Training topics include How Children Learn, Role of Parents in the School, and Contributions Parents Can Make at Home (Crespo & Louque, 1984).

Other models attempting to address the training requirements of minority language populations include Parents in Action (PIA) working out of California (Crespo & Louque, 1984), the S.T.E.P. Model or Systematic Training for Parents (Dinkmeyer & Mackay, 1976), Gordon's (1970) Parent Effectiveness Training (PET), and Glasser's Parent Involvement Program (Glasser, 1965).

One of the models developed specifically for Spanish- speaking parents in the Southwestern United States is the Casaus Model. This model, developed by Luis Casaus, Max Castillo, and Miguel Arciniega, was designed to assist Chicano parents to develop skills that would facilitate more active participation in the educational process by changing parental attitudes concerning their role in the education of their children (Casaus, Arciniega, & Castillo, 1982). The premise of this model is that exclusionary and oppressive practices affect the self-esteem, and therefore, it is important to establish a process that provides an opportunity, especially for minority language parents, to validate their background in a cultural sense before learning skills. Specialists who provide parent training have agreed with this premise and are providing this understanding in their training programs. A recent study by Cervantes, Baca, and Torres (1979) supports the main premise of the Casaus Model; that is, the cultural element must be a prime consideration when attempting to involve parents in the educational process (Cervantes et al., 1979).

There seems to be no question about the value and importance of parent participation and no lack of training opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and in many cases attitudes of parents as to their value in the educational efforts of their children. Why, then, has parental involvement not increased? Why do so many minority language parents continue to avoid any involvement in the school, and why has it been so difficult to maintain any continuity in terms of parent participation?

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN DETERMINING TRAINING NEEDS

One of the primary questions we confronted in this study of parent involvement was why it is so difficult to get parents involved and keep them involved. It seemed to us, at least initially, that all the ingredients for successful parental involvement were in place. There was widespread agreement in terms of the value of such involvement. Agencies providing educational support to family groups were being encouraged—and in some cases mandated—to provide for parental involvement. Training activities to support participation were made available (Bransford & Chávez, 1981).

Our tentative conclusion was that parents were not being sufficiently or appropriately included in the determination of their own training needs. A gap existed between the agency or institution training specialists' analysis of needs and the perception of the parents relative to training needs. This study attempted to investigate this gap by surveying parents actively involved in the educational efforts of their children and attempting to get accurate information on their perceptions of their training needs.

A thorough review of the literature preceded any field survey activity. This search allowed us to identify the various training areas perceived important for parents to undergo in order that they develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that would allow them to play a meaningful role in the education of their children.

The literature search turned up almost 100 different training topics. These were training topics that field practitioners and other specialists had identified as areas of need for parent training. Only the topics that appeared independently in more than two research studies or articles dealing with parent participation were used when the final listing was developed.

The 100 items compiled from the literature review were consolidated or combined to result in 75 items divided almost

evenly among the three categories of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Some of the items under the skills category (skills identified by experts in the field as important for parents to possess in order to become meaningfully involved in their children's educational efforts) included the following:

—Setting goals and objectives,
—Working with teachers in the classroom,
—Communicating with school officials,
—Communicating with children,
—Tutoring at home,
—Making decisions,
—Participating effectively in parent teacher conferences, and
—Developing parent networking systems.

Some items under the knowledge category included the following:

—Role of the teacher,
—Role of parents in school,
—Organization of local school,
—Purpose of the schools,
—How a child learns,
—Curriculum development process,
—Successful parent/child relationship, and
—Parenting practices that help the reading process.

In the attitudes category were the following items:

—Parents should motivate children to learn;
—Education is an individual responsibility;
—Parents should have a role in planning in the classroom;
—Education is important to enrich the quality of life;
—Ethnic diversity should be reflected in the classroom;
—Schools should reflect community values;
—Schools should solicit parental input; and
—A close, positive relationship should exist between school and home.

A pilot survey was developed using these 75 items grouped within the three categories of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This pilot survey was mailed to a sample of chairpersons of parent advisory committees (PACs) serving basic Title VII bilingual education programs in a five-state region served by the BUENO Bilingual Education Multifunctional Support Center (BEMSC). The PAC chairperson was asked to review the training

topics listed and to rank order the items within each category in terms of the perceived importance of each item relative to the meaningful involvement of parents in their children's education. Parents responding to this pilot survey were given the opportunity to add training topics items they felt had been left out and to rank those items along with those included in the list relative to their perceived importance. The purpose of the pilot survey was twofold: to validate the topics identified through the literature review and to indicate which of those items parents felt were the most important relative to their involvement in their children's education.

THE FIELD STUDY

A second, more general, survey was developed using the results of the pilot survey. The items selected by the panel as most important within each of the categories of skills, knowledge, and attitudes were included in the general survey. Those items that were ranked as the top 10 within each category were included in the general field survey. The general survey was mailed to 300 parents representing 30 basic bilingual education programs in the five-state designated service area referred to earlier (Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Utah). Respondents were asked to rate the items included in the survey using a four-point, Likert-type scale ranging from Not Important (1) to Very Important (4) in terms of the perceived importance for parents to possess in order that they may play a meaningful role in their children's educational efforts.

Of the 300 survey forms mailed out, 185 or 61 percent were returned in usable form. The study attempted to test three hypotheses stated in the null form:

H 1. There is no agreement among parents actively involved in their children's public school education relative to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes perceived to be important for parents to possess in order that they may play a meaningful role in their children's educational efforts.

H 2. There is no agreement among parents actively involved in their children's public school education in terms of the perceived relative importance of the identified skills, knowledge, and attitudes perceived important for parents to possess in order that they may play a meaningful role in their children's educational efforts.

H 3. There is no difference between the perception of relative importance of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes believed to be important for parents to possess in order that they may play a meaningful role in their children's educational efforts and:

- H 3a. The age of the respondent
- H 3b. The sex of the respondent
- H 3c. The marital status of the respondent
- H 3d. The size of the respondent's family
- H 3e. The family income level
- H 3f. The educational level of the respondent
- H 3g. The number of students enrolled in the school districts represented
- H 3h. The primary language preference of the respondent
- H 3i. The return date of the questionnaire
- H 3j. The occupation of the respondent, whether semiprofessional, professional, household, or unemployed
- H 3k. The location of the school, whether urban, suburban, or rural
- H 3l. The state where the respondent resides, whether New Mexico, Utah, Nebraska, Colorado, or Kansas.

The data were subjected to a number of statistical procedures. A frequency distribution of every independent variable and item included in each of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes categories was prepared. A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed for all items included in each of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes categories self-correlated. A one-factor analysis of variance was computed on all independent variables with items included in each of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes categories. Finally, a Duncan T test was employed to isolate significant differences among and within the items.

FINDINGS

A number of interesting findings resulted from this study. Parents responding to the initial pilot survey believed that training activities that would enable them to develop more effective communication with their children, the school, and with other parents were of utmost importance. Skills and knowledge that would allow them directly to assist their children with their study at home or to assist in the classroom were perceived to be very important. In general, parents were not interested in

developing enhanced capabilities in such areas as addressing a school board, understanding the legal process, or those issues more related to political, social, or legal awareness. No items that would fall in any of these governance categories were perceived to be important by the respondents.

The skill area that parents perceived to be the most important was "Communicating with Children." The knowledge area receiving the highest ranking in the pilot survey was "Knowing the Role of the Parent in the Home," followed closely by "How a Child Learns." Parents perceived their role in "Motivating the Child to Learn" as very important.

Parents responding to the general survey thought that all items included in the survey were important. There was wide agreement among all respondents in the perception that the items included in each of the categories of skills, knowledge, and attitudes were important for parents to possess.

When asked to consider the relative importance of those items included in the three categories, parents reported a high correlation among almost all items. This perception was found to be true in the skills, knowledge, and attitudes categories. Parents did not identify any single skill, knowledge, or attitude that was not closely related to at least one other. They felt that the enhancement in any one area would improve or at least impact on another.

Because we were interested in identifying the perceived needs of parents relative to training needs, we attempted to isolate the respondents relative to age, sex, socioeconomic status, and so forth. Information gleaned from this data could provide trainers with opportunities to tailor the training activities to better reflect the needs of different segments of the trainee population.

The third hypothesis stated that there would be no difference between the perception of relative importance of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes believed to be important for parents to possess in order that they may play a meaningful role in their children's educational efforts and the aforementioned variables 3a through 3l.

There was no significant difference in terms of the age of the respondent and the perceived relative importance of any of the items included in either of the categories. A significant difference was found to exist when looking at the sex of the respondent and perceived relative importance of the knowledge areas "The Role of Parents in the School" and "The Role of the Parent in the

Classroom." Male respondents perceived that understanding these roles was of less importance to any meaningful involvement in the educational process than was true of their female counterparts.

A difference in perception also occurred between the attitude item "Parents Should Motivate Children to Learn" and the age of the respondent. Respondents in the age range 36-65 perceived their role in motivating learning to be of less importance than did their younger counterparts (ages 19-35).

No significant difference between relative importance of category topics and the size of the respondent's family was found to exist. A significant difference was found to exist between the dependent variables and the independent variable family income level. Respondents reporting a family income of more than $50,000 per year perceived education as "Important to Achieve Financial Security" to be more important than did their lower income counterparts. They also perceived the knowledge items "How a Child Learns," "Teacher Role in Education," and "Relationship Between Home and School" to be more important than did the lower income respondents.

Educational level seemed to have little relationship in terms of the perceived relative importance of those items found in the three categories. This was not the case when looking at size of school as determined by the number of students enrolled in the school district. Respondents from larger (higher enrollment) school districts reported that "Communicating with Children," "Communicating with School Officials," and the "Development of Closer Relationships Between Teacher, Home, and School," were more important skills to possess than did the respondents from smaller school districts. School districts were grouped according to size of enrollment: Group One, 100 to 1,000 students; Group Two, 1,000 to 3,000 students; Group Three, 3,000 and over. Group Three respondents perceived these items to be more important than did their counterparts in the other two groups.

There was only a slight difference in terms of the perception of the respondents and the relative importance of any of the skills, knowledge, or attitudes items when isolated according to the language preference of the respondent. Spanish-speaking respondents found "Tutoring at Home" to be a more important skill to be developed than did their English-speaking counterparts.

No differences among respondents' perceptions were noted for the independent variables "date of questionnaire" and "occupation of respondent" (whether semiprofessional, professional, household, or unemployed). There were some differences in perception between the perceived relative importance of several of the items listed under the skills, knowledge, and attitudes categories and "the location of the school" (whether urban, suburban, or rural). Respondents from suburban schools thought that "Communicating with Children," "Communicating with School Officials," "Facilitating Greater Parental Involvement," and "Roles of Parents" were less important skills to be developed than did their counterparts in rural and urban schools.

Differences were also noted between the perception of relative importance of skills, knowledge, and attitudes perceived as important for parents to possess and "the state where the respondent resides, whether New Mexico, Utah, Nebraska, Colorado, or Kansas." Those respondents from the state of Utah had different perceptions relative to the importance of the role of parents, the issue of networking, and the whole issue of enhanced communication from those of their counterparts in the other states surveyed. In effect, the respondents from Utah found these issues or topics to be of less importance than did the others.

The study found that parents were generally in agreement, not only with themselves and as a group but with trainers as well, in terms of parent training topic areas. They believed that all those items identified as important for parents to possess in order to enhance their roles as partners with their children in the education process were important. They did not include any of the governance issues among those perceived to be important.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings may have implications for individuals attempting to design and develop training programs for parents. Although the general topics are generally agreed on, trainers should understand that parents are requesting practical training that is directly applicable to the child in the schoolroom. They are not as interested in policy matters or less abstract theoretical understandings.

Parents also differ in what they see as important according to those independent variables studied. Trainers should group parents according to perceived needs, but consider the different

perceptions of priorities and needs determined by their differing social, emotional, and personal characteristics.

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